

Eskimo

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Eskimos are the indigenous circumpolar peoples who have traditionally inhabited the northern circumpolar region from eastern Siberia (Russia) to Alaska (United States), Canada, and Greenland. Today, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is composed of approximately 160,000 Inuit people living across Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia. The two main peoples known as "Eskimo" are the Inuit—including the Alaskan Inupiat peoples, the Greenlandic Inuit, and the mass-grouping Inuit peoples of Canada—and the Yupik of eastern Siberia and Alaska. A third northern group, the Aleut, is closely related to both. They share a relatively recent common ancestor and a language group (Eskimo-Aleut). The Chukchi People, from Siberia, are also the closest living relatives of Inuit, and Yupik people.

The non-Inuit sub-branch of the Eskimo branch of the Eskimo-Aleut language family consists of four distinct Yupik languages, two used in the Russian Far East and St. Lawrence Island, and two used in western Alaska, southwestern Alaska, and the western part of Southcentral Alaska. The extinct language of the Sirenik people is sometimes argued to be related to these.

The word "Eskimo" comes from the Montagnais word for "snowshoe-netter" according to scholars at the Smithsonian Institution. The governments in Canada and Greenland^[citation needed] have ceased using it in official documents. Instead, Canada officially uses the term "Inuit" to describe the native people living in the country's northernmost sector. The ICC voted to substitute the word Eskimo with Inuit in 1977.

History

Several earlier indigenous peoples existed in the northern circumpolar regions of eastern Siberia, Alaska, and Canada (although probably not in Greenland). The earliest positively identified Paleo-Eskimo cultures (Early Paleo-Eskimo) date to 5,000 years ago. They appear to have developed in Alaska from people related to the Arctic small tool tradition in eastern Asia, whose ancestors had probably migrated to Alaska at least 3,000 to 5,000 years earlier. Similar artefacts have been found in Siberia that date to perhaps 18,000 years ago.

The Yupik languages and cultures in Alaska evolved in place, beginning with the original pre-Dorset indigenous culture developed in Alaska. Approximately 4000 years ago, the Unangan culture of the Aleut became distinct. It is not generally considered an Eskimo culture.

Approximately 1,500–2,000 years ago, apparently in northwestern Alaska, two other distinct variations appeared. Inuit language became distinct and, over a period of several centuries, its speakers migrated across northern Alaska, through Canada and into Greenland. The distinct culture of the Thule people developed in northwestern Alaska and very quickly spread over the entire area occupied by Eskimo people, though it was not necessarily adopted by all of them.

Origin

The most commonly accepted etymological origin of the word "Eskimo" is derived by Ives Goddard at the Smithsonian Institution, from the Montagnais (see Algonquian languages) word meaning "snowshoe-netter" or "to net snowshoes". The word *assime-w* means "she laces a snowshoe" in Montagnais. Montagnais speakers refer to the neighbouring Mi'kmaq people using words that sound like eskimo

In 1978, Jose Mailhot, a Quebec anthropologist who speaks Montagnais, published a paper suggesting that Eskimo meant "people who speak a different language". French traders who encountered the Montagnais in the eastern areas, adopted their word for the more western peoples and spelled it as Esquimau in a transliteration.

Some people consider Eskimo derogatory because it is popularly perceived to mean "eaters of raw meat" in Algonquian languages common to people along the Atlantic coast. One Cree speaker suggested the original word that became corrupted to Eskimo might have been *askamiciw* (which means "he eats it raw"); the Inuit are referred to in some Cree texts as *askipiw* (which means "eats something raw"). The continued use of "Eskimo" as opposed to Inuit or other preferred name implies and reinforces a perception that the Inuit are unimportant and remote.

Language

The Eskimo sub-family consists of the Inuit language and Yupik language sub-groups. The Sirenikski language, which is virtually extinct, is sometimes regarded as a third branch of the Eskimo language family. Other sources regard it as a group belonging to the Yupik branch.^{[45][46]}

Inuit languages comprise a dialect continuum, or dialect chain, that stretches from Unalakleet and Norton Sound in Alaska, across northern Alaska and Canada, and east to Greenland. Changes from western to eastern dialects are marked by the dropping of vestigial Yupik-related features, increasing consonant assimilation (e.g., *kumlu*, meaning "thumb", changes to *kuvlu*, changes to *kublu*, changes to *kulluk*, changes to *kulluq*), and increased consonant lengthening, and lexical change. Thus, speakers of two adjacent Inuit dialects would usually be able to understand one another, but speakers from dialects distant from each other on the dialect continuum would have difficulty understanding one another. Seward Peninsula dialects in western Alaska, where much of the Iñupiat culture has been in place for perhaps less than 500 years, are greatly affected by phonological influence from the Yupik languages. Eastern Greenlandic, at the opposite end of the Inuit range, has had significant word replacement due to a unique form of ritual name avoidance

Food

The Inuit have traditionally been fishers and hunters. They still hunt whales (esp. bowhead whale), seal, polar bears, muskoxen, birds, and fish and at times other less commonly eaten animals such as the Arctic fox. The typical Inuit diet is high in protein and very high in fat – in their traditional diets, Inuit consumed an average of 75% of their daily energy intake from fat. While it is not possible to cultivate plants for food in the Arctic, the Inuit have traditionally gathered those that are naturally available. Grasses, tubers, roots, stems, berries,

and seaweed (kuanniq or edible seaweed) were collected and preserved depending on the season and the location. There is a vast array of different hunting technologies that the Inuit used to gather their food.

In the 1920s, anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson lived with and studied a group of Inuit. The study focused on the fact that the Inuit's low-carbohydrate diet had no adverse effects on their health, nor indeed, Stefansson's own health. Stefansson (1946) also observed that the Inuit were able to get the necessary vitamins they needed from their traditional winter diet, which did not contain any plant matter. In particular, he found that adequate vitamin C could be obtained from items in their traditional diet of raw meat such as ringed seal liver and whale skin (muktuk). While there was considerable skepticism when he reported these findings, they have been borne out in recent studies and analyses. However, the Inuit have lifespans 12 to 15 years shorter than the average Canadian's, which is thought to be a result of limited access to medical services. The life expectancy gap is not closing. Furthermore, fish oil supplement studies have failed to support claims of preventing heart attacks or strokes.

Clothing

Inuit made clothes and footwear from animal skins, sewn together using needles made from animal bones and threads made from other animal products, such as sinew. The anorak (parka) is made in a similar fashion by Arctic peoples from Europe through Asia and the Americas, including the Inuit. The hood of an amauti, (women's parka, plural amautiit) was traditionally made extra-large with a separate compartment below the hood to allow the mother to carry a baby against her back and protect it from the harsh wind. Styles vary from region to region, from the shape of the hood to the length of the tails. Boots (mukluk), could be made of caribou or seal skin, and designed for men and women.

Igloo

An **igloo** also known as a **snow house** or **snow hut**, is a type of shelter built of snow, typically built when the snow is suitable. Although igloos are often associated with all Inuit and Eskimo peoples, they were traditionally used only by the people of Canada's Central Arctic and Greenland's Thule area. Other Inuit tended to use snow to insulate their houses, which were constructed from whalebone and hides. Snow is used because the air pockets trapped in it make it an insulator. On the outside, temperatures may be as low as $-45\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($-49\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$), but on the inside, the temperature may range from -7 to $16\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ (19 to $61\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$) when warmed by body heat alone.

Nomenclature: The Inuit language word iglu can be used for a house or home built of any material, and is not restricted exclusively to snow houses), but includes traditional tents, sod houses, homes constructed of driftwood and modern buildings. Several dialects throughout the Canadian Arctic use iglu for all buildings, including snow houses, and it is the term used by the Government of Nunavut. An exception to this is the dialect used in the Igloodik region. Iglu is used for other buildings, while igluvijaq, is specifically used for a snow house. Outside Inuit culture, however, igloo refers exclusively to shelters constructed from blocks of compacted snow, generally in the form of a dome.

Types: There are three traditional types of igloos, all of different sizes and used for different purposes:

The smallest are constructed as temporary shelters, usually only used for one or two nights so they are easier to build. On rare occasions these are built and used during hunting trips, often on open sea ice

Intermediate-sized igloos were for semi-permanent, family dwelling. This was usually a single room dwelling that housed one or two families. Often there were several of these in a small area, which formed an Inuit village.

The largest igloos were normally built in groups of two. One of the buildings was a temporary structure built for special occasions, the other built nearby for living. These might have had up to five rooms and housed up to 20 people. A large igloo might have been constructed from several smaller igloos attached by their tunnels, giving common access to the outside. These were used to hold community feasts and traditional dances.

Building methods: The snow used to build an igloo must have enough structural strength to be cut and stacked appropriately. The best snow to use for this purpose is snow which has been blown by wind, which can serve to compact and interlock the ice crystals; snow that has settled gently to the ground in still weather is not useful. The hole left in the snow where the blocks are cut is usually used as the lower half of the shelter. Snow's insulating properties enable the inside of the igloo to remain relatively warm. In some cases, a single block of clear freshwater ice is inserted to allow light into the igloo. Igloos used as winter shelters had beds made of loose snow, skins, and caribou furs. Sometimes, a short tunnel is constructed at the entrance, to reduce wind and heat loss when the door is opened. Animal skins or a snow block can be used as a door. Architecturally, the igloo is unique in that it is a dome that can be raised out of independent blocks leaning on each other and polished to fit without an additional supporting structure during construction. An igloo that is built correctly will support the weight of a person standing on the roof. Traditionally, an igloo might be deliberately consolidated immediately after construction by making a large flame, briefly making the interior very hot, which causes the walls to melt slightly and settle. Body heat is also adequate, if slower. This melting and refreezing builds up a layer of ice that contributes to the strength of the igloo. The sleeping platform is a raised area. Because warmer air rises and cooler air settles, the entrance area acts as a cold trap whereas the sleeping area will hold whatever heat is generated by a stove, lamp, body heat, or other device. The Central Inuit, especially those around the Davis Strait, lined the living area with skin, which could increase the temperature within from around 2 °C (36 °F) to 10–20 °C (50–68 °F).

Transport

The Inuit peoples hunted sea animals from single-passenger, covered seal-skin boats called qajaq (Inuktitut syllabics: which were extraordinarily buoyant, and could easily be righted by a seated person, even if completely overturned. Because of this property, the design was copied by Europeans and Americans who still produce them under the Inuit name kayak.

Inuit also made umiaq ("woman's boat"), larger open boats made of wood frames covered with animal skins, for transporting people, goods, and dogs. They were 6–12 m (20–39 ft) long and had a flat bottom so that the boats could come close to shore. In the winter, Inuit would also hunt sea mammals by patiently watching an aglu (breathing hole) in the ice and waiting for the air-breathing seals to use them. This technique is also used by the polar bear, who hunts by seeking holes in the ice and waiting nearby.

In winter, both on land and on sea ice, the Inuit used dog sleds (qamutik) for transportation. The husky dog breed comes from the Siberian Husky. These dogs were bred from wolves, for transportation. A team of dogs in either a tandem/side-by-side or fan formation would pull a sled made of wood, animal bones, or the baleen from a whale's mouth and even frozen fish, over the snow and ice. The Inuit used stars to navigate at sea and landmarks to navigate on land; they possessed a comprehensive native system of toponymy. Where natural landmarks were insufficient, the Inuit would erect an inukshuk. Also, Greenland Inuit created Ammassalik wooden maps, which are tactile devices that represent the coast line.

Dogs played an integral role in the annual routine of the Inuit. During the summer they became pack animals, sometimes dragging up to 20 kg of baggage and in the winter they pulled the sled. Yearlong they assisted with hunting by sniffing out seals' holes and pestering polar bears. They also protected the Inuit villages by barking at bears and strangers. The Inuit generally favored, and tried to breed, the most striking and handsome of dogs, especially ones with bright eyes and a healthy coat. Common husky dog breeds used by the Inuit were the Canadian Eskimo Dog, the official animal of Nunavut (Qimmiq; Inuktitut for dog), the Greenland Dog, the Siberian Husky and the Alaskan Malamute. The Inuit would perform rituals over the newborn pup to give it favorable qualities; the legs were pulled to make them grow strong and the nose was poked with a pin to enhance the sense of smell.

Industry and art

Inuit industry relied almost exclusively on animal hides, driftwood, and bones, although some tools were also made out of worked stones, particularly the readily worked soapstone. Walrus ivory was a particularly essential material, used to make knives. Art played a big part in Inuit society and continues to do so today. Small sculptures of animals and human figures, usually depicting everyday activities such as hunting and whaling, were carved from ivory and bone. In modern times prints and figurative works carved in relatively soft stone such as soapstone, serpentinite, or argillite have also become popular.

Gender roles, marriage, birth and community

The division of labour in traditional Inuit society had a strong gender component, but it was not absolute. The men were traditionally hunters and fishermen and the women took care of the children, cleaned the home, sewed, processed food, and cooked. However, there are numerous examples of women who hunted, out of necessity or as a personal choice. At the same time men, who could be away from camp for several days at a time, would be expected to know how to sew and cook.

The marital customs among the Inuit were not strictly monogamous: many Inuit relationships were implicitly or explicitly sexual. Open marriages, polygamy, divorce, and remarriage were

known. Among some Inuit groups, if there were children, divorce required the approval of the community and particularly the agreement of the elders. Marriages were often arranged, sometimes in infancy, and occasionally forced on the couple by the community.

Marriage was common for women at puberty and for men when they became productive hunters. Family structure was flexible: a household might consist of a man and his wife (or wives) and children; it might include his parents or his wife's parents as well as adopted children; it might be a larger formation of several siblings with their parents, wives and children; or even more than one family sharing dwellings and resources. Every household had its head, an elder or a particularly respected man.

There was also a larger notion of community as, generally, several families shared a place where they wintered. Goods were shared within a household, and also, to a significant extent, within a whole community.

The Inuit were hunter-gatherers, and have been referred to as nomadic. One of the customs following the birth of an infant was for an Angakkuq (shaman) to place a tiny ivory carving of a whale into the baby's mouth, in hopes this would make the child good at hunting. Loud singing and drumming were also customs.



Living area of Eskimo